

Honey

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Summary: It isn't so much the big differences as the sum of the small ones.

Honey

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><p>It isn't long after the sun has set on a long summer day when he appears at the window, planting his elbows on the sill and poking his head in. When she hears his low "Hey" she pauses in her braiding and glances over her shoulder at him, mostly glad she hasn't changed into her nightgown yet but also a little disappointed. She wishes him good evening with an arched eyebrow as she returns to her plait, long fingers moving nimbly through her hair. He's quiet for a beat, then asks if she wants to go for a ride as she ties off the braid securely with a bit of broken bowstring. It's sweet that he's asked, even when he must already know the answerâ€"her mum would appreciate his courtesy, even if she didn't appreciate his timingâ€"but she wonders if it's just the hour demanding discreetness that has his voice husky. In answer she sweeps the plait over her shoulder, stands, extinguishes the lamp, steps out of the window onto the dragon's back.<p>

It's dark enough now that Toothless fades into the twilight, leaving only the suggestion of his shape as reassurance. The air outside is cool and he radiates heat where she touches him, her hands light above his waist, her knees grazing his thighs; though the contrast leaves her with goosebumps she neither moves closer to his warmth nor stops breathing deeply of the night air. Below them Toothless flaps unhurriedly, the stars are where they ought to be above, and he is solid and steady and sure.

They light on a tall spire of rock out at sea, the lights of the

village winking at them across a stretch of water. He helps her off, and as Toothless sidles away she steps forward, peering down from the height. Between the pull of the waves and the scattered rocks below she knows a fall from here would be fatal; even the fastest dragon couldn't catch her before she hit. She sits at the edge, dangling her legs into the drop, and he settles beside her. "What do you think of Berk?" he asks, leaning back on his hands.

She's been there long enough to have an opinion beyond her first impression. The island is rough and wild, its people mad, both land and inhabitants unexpectedly lovely; she's more charmed by it all than she'd like to admit. It will never inspire the same ferocious devotion DunBroch doesâ€”DunBroch is her blood and her bones, the twist in her hair and the curl of her tongue around the word \_home\_â€”but she's fond of Berk, already, fonder than she'd thought she would be, and in return the island has welcomed her, in its unrefined way.

As he waits for her answer he isn't looking at her, just as she isn't looking at him as she thinks. In the dim light she can just make out his profile, jaw and nose and forehead with hair falling over it, all of him subtly colored in the near-dark. With troubling ease her mind fills in the details that her eyes can't make out: the scar on his chin, the braids in his hair, the glimmer of his eyes. She drums her heels against the rock, listening to the waves and hearing his breathing, the sighs of the dragon behind them. This far from land, alone with them, anything could happen; she's helpless as she's ever been, entirely beyond saving. She slides one knee over the other, rolls her shoulders, drops her hands into the dirt a hairsbreadth from his dusty fingertips.

She says, "I think it's the most dangerous place I've ever been."

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><p>Before they arrived she was prepared for the big differences between home and here. "It's another country," her mum lectured, "with different customs and laws. You mustn't expect everything to be the way it is here." She scoffed, as is her wont, but soon the truth of the lesson made itself known. Though she thought herself prepared for dragons, she still gaped like a prize idiot the first time she saw one.<p>

People are people, she realizes as Snotlout winks and flexes his muscles at her, and her brothers ask the blond twins if there aren't any three-headed dragons ("No," Ruffnut says, expression sympathetic as she shakes her head; "But we could make one for you," Tuffnut offers, hefting his ax), no matter where they're from. The chief is like her dad but not: he's wearier, sterner, but loves Berk and her people as much as Fergus does DunBroch. The Hooligans may dress a bit strangely, speak in off-kilter cadences, but their laughter, their hunger, their anger are like hers, desperately human.

It isn't so much the big differences as the sum of the small ones. The breezes that blow through Berk are briny, the scent of fish a constant in the village; she remembers the wind off of the loch smelling sweet and mossy. Here the whir and whoosh of flight never ceases, and the muted roars at bedtime no longer send her into a panic. Though the season is cooler the days last longer, the sun lingering above the horizon for far longer than it ought to.

Even the taste of certain foods catches her unawares. She spreads honey on a slice of bread, then licks a smear of it from her hand; the taste makes her pause with her finger in her mouth. DunBroch honey tastes like the hills, heather and apple blossoms, light and delicate. The bees of Berk must be hearty, nearly wee dragons themselves, to make this honey. Heavy on her tongue, it tastes of berries and herbs she can't name, no matter how she racks her brain. A sound across the table, the clearing of his throat, maybe, draws her attention and as she sucks the last of the sweetness away her eyes catch on him, note the flush staining his cheeks. It deepens when she licks her lips.

He falls into step beside her as they leave the mead hall. "Enjoy your breakfast?" he asks conversationally.

"Yes, thank you."

"You'd think there was no honey in the Highlands," he remarks, and his eyes are curious and flickering dark. Her smile comes slow and troublesome.

"It tastes different here," she tells him, watching his gaze dart to her lips.

"Is that so?" At her nod his voice drops, any casual pretense lost. "Do you like it?"

She tilts her head. "I'd have to try it again to know for sure."

He nods. "You've got to be able to make a well-informed decision," he agrees solemnly before a smile hitches onto his lips.

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><p>As she's meant to do, she speaks less and listens more, observes the pair of chieftains as they dance and demand. When watching their beards bristle fails to hold her attention she turns her eyes to him instead and tries not to consider her time better spent that way. If he's as bored by the proceedings as she is, he hides it better, tracking their fathers' posturing and occasionally making notes.<p>

Of all the unusual things on the island, he is by far the most exceptional. It's easy enough to believe the stories of his former disgrace, his failings and failures; having seen his relationship with the dragons it's easier still to believe the tale of his redemption. The island is full of things he's made: his friends point them out at every turn, his ideas, his inventions—his influence is undeniable. Despite it all, the esteem he's held in, the respect people have for his opinion, he never believes he's done enough for them, dragons and Vikings alike. Even someone who isn't the focus of his devotion must find it admirable, and she does.

Oh, he's far from perfect (and she's no better): he condescends, questions everything, uses his wit as a weapon against those poorly armed for such a fight. Given the opportunity he would disappear with Toothless for hours on end without telling anyone where he'd gone, escape into the wilderness with his best friend and return too much later, dirt-smudged and grinning, to the rebuke and disapproval of

his father, his mentor, his right-hand warrior. The load of what he must be, son and heir and hero and leader, forces his shoulders to tense, to tighten and twitch.

As much as he loves Berk, he wants more than it can give him. Whenever he's not with Toothless, not in the air, he longs to be; he tries to hide it but the yearning is always there, revealing itself in a stifled sigh, in eyes drawn to the horizon. There's more to the world than the ground beneath their feet, than that which is visible, than what seems to be. The knowledge of it makes living that much harder sometimes.

They've a thing or two in common, the pair of them.

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><p>The village is the world he's helped to make, but this place, tucked away in the woods, is the world that helped to make him. It's as sacred a site as the stone circleâ€"they've made it that way, dragon and man, with their strength, their friendship. Under its sway the ties of decorum and obligation loosen. She exhales.<p>

Around them trees and rocks and water are silvered by moonlight, and shadows fall sharp-edged on the ground. "I used to believe in fate," she says, as much to the night as to him. She needn't tell him of the lessons she learned, not when he's mastered them as well and lost more in the process. He doesn't ask what she believes in now.

Time is rushing onward; outside this haven the world awaits, rough and demanding, ready to usher them back into the parts they must play. They have drifted together, tugged by a tide that will just as easily force them apart. In too few days the ships will sail, whether their clans reach an accord or not. Were there something she could do, some action to take to aid the negotiations, she would do it, for the prosperity of her people and the safety of the people she's grown fond of. All of their talk, mature and reasonable and diplomatic, makes her restless, makes her feel reckless and impatient, poised to act.

He's closer than she realized. "It's simple, really," he murmurs, as if answering a question she doesn't think she's asked. She begins to snap back, to beg forgiveness for her ignorance but she doesn't understand what he means, but his hand slides up her arm, haltingly at first and then surer when she offers no resistance. It skims from her shoulder to her jaw, the thumb tracing the curve of her cheek, and she entertains the idea that he's right.

For the first time she feels evanescent. Everything that weighs her downâ€"her position, her appearance, the armor of her attitudeâ€"lifts under his ministrations and she stands merely, perfectly herself. Despite her calluses his hands are rougher than hers; they catch in her hair, on the fine fabric of her dress. His lips brush hers, measured, contained, until she sighs or moans or curses against them, she can't be sure which; then he smirks and presses his mouth firmly to hers. One hand is set in the dip of her waist, anchoring her to the earth, lest she float away, and the other strokes the nape of her neck, sends shivers across her scalp and down her spine. No one has ever kissed her so wellâ€"no suitor desirous of her throne, no boy fumbling at her in a dark corner. She winds her fingers in his tunic and pulls him closer, loses her breath in his

lungs and feels his heart thrumming against her chest. She can feel the lightning in his veins as it crackles through his touch into her, half expects to see branching burns left where his skin has covered hers.

When he pulls back, breath coming in pants against her sensitive lips as his forehead rests on hers, her eyes stay closed, though she knows if she opens them the world will stop wheeling. She lets her head drop to his chest, buries her nose in the fabric of his shirt: he smells like the sanguine tang of tamed metal, like dragon hide and the hot sky.

Heaven and earth cannot hold them.

End  
file.